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Department of Energy
Nevada Operations Office
P.O. Box 14100
Las Vegas, NV 89114

MAY 25 1979

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MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD

VISIT WITH THE PRESIDENT AND THE CABINET OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

On May 1, 1979 the new Constitutional Government of the Marshall Islands took office at Majuro. The President, Amata Kabua, 51 years old, is a native of Jaluit Atoll and served as a Senator in the Congress of Micronesia from 1965 when that body was established, until October 1978 when the Marshall Islands separated itself from the Congress. The Ministers of President Kabua's Cabinet (all members of the Nitijela (Parliament)) are listed on the attachment, as are the Secretaries of the Cabinet Departments.

On May 17, 1979, it was my privilege to be invited to meet with the President and the Cabinet. I had earlier visited briefly and personally with the President (a long-time acquaintance) to congratulate him upon his election and at that time had mentioned that there were several items I should like to discuss. He chose to meet me, accompanied by Harry Brown, while the Cabinet was in session. Though a surprise, this was not at all awkward. I had known a number of the Ministers earlier. I believe that only Hon. Ataji Balos, Minister of Internal Security, was absent, he being in Washington, D.C.

President Kabua extended a gracious welcome, with introductions around the table. Then, however, he turned quickly to business for about an hour of real substance.

I had mentioned our wish to gain the cooperation of the Tobolar* Copra Plant for studies which would lead to replication of the Tobolar process on a laboratory scale at Livermore. I had discussed this matter earlier with the Government's Chief Secretary, Oscar deBrum and his staff and

*Tobolar: The corporate name of the cooperatively owned Copra Mill at Majuro--the only one in the Marshalls. The word Tobolar is the Marshallese name of a sprouting coconut.

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had been advised by them that it would be wise to meet with the Tobolar Board and explain our intentions. It had been suggested also that we might discuss our plans with Joe Murphy, publisher of the Micronesian Independent.

The President's reaction to the copra question was quite surprising. Although he has known for some time of our interest and concern, at this time his reaction was quite negative. He asked, "Why involve us at all in this question? If you have questions to which you need answers, why not find your own ways to answer them? If you want to buy some of our oil and cake, do so; but don't make a big show of it."

I explained that we intended no "big show," but neither did we plan to try to do this surreptitiously. "We feel that we must be open and candid with you and with the Tobolar Board, and if people have questions about our interest we intend to be honest with them." I explained that our main purpose will be to try to understand the Tobolar process in order that the laboratory process may truly represent it. "We also wish to find out how the nutrients in the copra are partitioned between the oil and the cake, how much is in the undissolved solids in the oil, etc." I stressed that we do not plan to introduce anything into the Tobolar. We just want to observe what is happening there now, in the course of its normal operation.

President Kabua asked why the Department of Energy is so interested in the copra question. I responded that there seemed to be two good bases for our interest. First, the economy of Enewetak (and eventually of Bikini, should that atoll ever again be resettled) would be heavily dependent upon copra; and second, the Tobolar plant itself, I understood, was actively seeking other sources of copra in order that it might some day reach its production capacity.

The President: "Do you think that you will ever be able to say that the oil and cake from Bikini or Enewetak are acceptable for World commerce?" My answer: "I don't know what standard the World market may apply but I think that there is a very good chance that the oil--properly filtered and processed--may be found to be free of radioactive contamination to be accepted by the market. The President: "Do you really think anyone will believe the United States Department of Energy when it says the oil is safe?" Answer: "I sincerely hope so. But in any case, your market can make its own checks to determine whether the standards are being met. I believe I am correct in my understanding that all of your shipments of copra cake to Hawaii are sampled and analyzed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. In just the same way it would seem to me that your customer for oil could sample each shipment and not have to

rely upon our statements or yours." At this point we dropped the copra issue.

Next, the President asked "In your personal opinion, is Enyu a safe place to live?" My answer: "That unfortunately is not a yes-or-no question. Unquestionably it would be acceptable to reside on Enyu if all or most of your diet came from sources away from Bikini Atoll. If, on the other hand, all or most of your diet came from Enyu Island, then at least for the next couple of decades you would exceed the U.S. Federal radiation guides. In between these two extremes, there may be a living pattern that is realistic and reasonable that would permit resettlement of Enyu. A new dose assessment for an Enyu settlement has been developed by Lawrence Livermore Laboratory and is now, I believe, being reviewed by DOE Headquarters in Washington. This will be discussed with the Department of the Interior very soon and I presume will include some specific recommendations by the Department of Energy. You have asked for my personal opinion and I guess that's about as far as I can go at this time."

The President then asked: "What can you tell us about Bikar and Bokar? We understand from the Chief Secretary, who received his information from the High Commissioner, that both of these atolls, which had been considered as relocation sites for Bikini/Kili people, must now be dropped from consideration because of the high radiation levels." My answer: "I am unaware of any radiological basis for your statements. In the first place, the survey of the Northern Marshalls did not include Bokar, because it was so far North of the fallout pattern. As to Bikar, I do not recall at the moment what the aerial measurements showed, but I am confident that the numbers were extremely low. I assure you that I shall check upon my return to Nevada and advise you further. The only data yet available from the Northern Marshalls survey and pertaining to Bikar would be from aerial measurements and I am virtually certain that this would provide no basis for placing any restrictions on Bikar."

The President: "What can you tell us about the high incidence of thyroid abnormalities at Likiep? Tony (Anton deBrum, Actg. Secretary of Resources and Development) has gathered statistics which show that there are 50 or 60 thyroid cases at Likiep. Are these due to the

*Bokar is another name for Taongi Atoll (approximately 170°E, 14°N)

pollution?* What is the Department of Energy going to do about it? Will these people be examined?"

Answer: "As you know, I am not a physician and I am not qualified at all to comment upon thyroid problems and their causes. I have been aware of Tony's data and will assure you that it will be brought to the attention of the responsible and qualified people in Washington. Although I cannot commit them to any specific action such as examinations of the 50 or 60 people you mention, I am sure that I can commit them to examining the data that Tony has and discussing it with him."

The President: "We understand that the entire Northern area of the Marshall Islands is polluted. Is this true?"

Answer: "As you know, there is some radiation everywhere on earth. Some of this is radiation from natural sources, some is widely distributed low level fallout from atomic tests, and some is more intense and localized such as that found at Bikini and Enewetak and some areas of Ailinginae, Rongelap and Rongerik. Radiation levels elsewhere in the Marshalls are extremely low--lower than most areas in the United States. The results of the Northern Marshalls survey will portray these conditions in detail."

The President: "When will the results of the survey of the Northern Marshalls be available?"

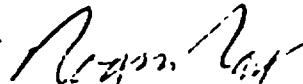
Answer: "All of the aerial measurements data are now available and are being considered in the continuing analysis and evaluation which is being done by Lawrence Livermore Laboratory. Priority has been given to Bikini and Enyu Islands of Bikini Atoll and that assessment should be ready for reporting about now in Washington. The balance of the work will continue for many months and priority will be given to those islands and atolls which are or may be inhabited and which are known from the aerial survey to have measurable contamination."

The President: "As you know, we are very anxious to have that information as soon as possible. Now on behalf of myself and the Ministers of the Cabinet, I thank you for taking the time to visit with us. None of us are trying to embarrass the United States, but we do need to be informed. You are always candid with us and we appreciate that."

*President Kabua has consistently used the term "pollution" for radioactive contamination.

Answer: "Thank you, Mr. President, and thank all of the Ministers for this opportunity."

Final Note: Since I neither took notes nor recorded this meeting, the above is essentially paraphrase based upon notes made immediately after the meeting. Certain matters of lesser significance and the "small talk" pleasantries are omitted.


Roger Ray, Assistant for
Pacific Operations

MARSHALL ISLANDS CABINET

Minister of Finance - Atjang Paul (Ailinglaplap)

Minister of Communication and Transportation - Ruben R. Zackhras (Ailinglaplap)

Minister of Resources and Development - Kessai Note (Jabot)

Minister of Social Welfare - Jina Lavin (Majuro)

Minister of Public Works - Kunar Abner (Ailuk)

Minister of Education - Tom Kijiner (Likiep)

Minister of Public Health - Henry Samuel (Majuro)

Minister of Internal Affairs - Wilfred Kendall (Majuro)

Minister of Internal Security - Ataji Balos (Kwajalein)